

Why Teachers Should Encourage the WEA to Come to the Negotiating Table

March 2009 – an FWS essay by Barb Billinghamurst – www.fundingwaschools.org

WEA's main arguments against moving ahead with ed reform don't bear up under close inspection. Teachers have more to gain by WEA's negotiating better terms for teachers than by its refusal to support the pending ed reform bills. This first paper takes on WEA's complaint that no funding is attached to the ed reform bill, that it's a non-funded mandate. Other papers will explain how teachers would benefit from the ed reform bill.

WEA Complaint: *There is no funding attached to the ed reform bill.*

Money is an issue. But, the solution is not to attach a revenue source to the proposed legislation; rather it is to legally define basic education so that a rational and transparent cost can be calculated.

Identifying a revenue source is one thing. Getting sufficient support for it is quite another.

Consider the big picture. Experts will tell you that a strategy for winning increased state funding for education involves three groups: state legislators, courts and voters. Launching the ed reform bills is part of a bigger strategy to win the support of all three groups.

These bills come at a time when the state is facing an adequacy lawsuit in June and the public understanding of the crisis in education funding is growing.

Everyone knows that the state is legally obligated to fully fund basic education. The problem is that current law does not allow for the logical and transparent calculation of the cost of basic education.

The intent of the legislators sponsoring SB 5444 and HB 1410 is to define basic education by detailing in law the specific programs and funding formulas. This has never been done before. The goal is to put a price on basic education.

In the upcoming adequacy lawsuit, the Superior Court would then have the legal criteria to order the state to fully fund basic education to the level called for by the new law. Education is the paramount duty of the state. Under court order, it will be up to State legislators to figure out how to fund it.

The likelihood that the plaintiff districts and parents will win their adequacy lawsuit is quite good – *especially if the new definition of basic education is in law.*

The lawsuit is a major factor in the calculus to bring new funding to education. About 70 school districts and community groups have signed on as supporters. To learn more about the lawsuit, visit www.waschoolexcellence.org.

Meanwhile, many stakeholders, such as the PTA, the League of Education Voters, the Urban League and Stand for Children are proceeding with efforts to educate the public about the crisis in funding basic education. The voting public must see that that everyone's future is inevitably linked to a well-educated citizenry.

The voting public must be motivated to financially support basic education. No one is kidding themselves about the cost of educating our children. The Basic Education Finance Task Force estimated that the additional biennium cost ranges from \$6.3 to \$8.9 billion.

Redirecting existing funds, capturing excess revenues, or raising new revenues are policy options that are all on the table. The truth of the matter is that a revenue solution is likely to involve all three.

As events unfold this year - passage of a revised definition of public education, a successful lawsuit, and a better educated public - education funding has a chance of garnering the support it needs of legislators, courts, and voters. Without the support of all three, it has no chance at all.

So, WEA take note: Don't stop the race before it even begins.